UNITED
NATIONS

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Economic and Social Council

Distr.
GENERAL

E/1986/WG.1/SR.12
25 April 1986

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

First regular session, 1986

SESSIONAL WORKING GROUP OF GOVERNMENTAL EXPERTS ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL COVENANT ON ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 12th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Tuesday, 22 April 1986, at 10.30 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. RUIZ-CABAÑAS (Mexico)

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Consideration of reports submitted in accordance with Council resolution 1988 (LX) by States parties to the Covenant concerning rights covered by articles 13 to 15

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The meeting was called to order at 10.40 a.m.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS SUBMITTED IN ACCORDANCE WITH COUNCIL RESOLUTION 1988 (LX) BY STATES PARTIES TO THE COVENANT CONCERNING RIGHTS COVERED BY ARTICLES 13 TO 15

Initial report of Venezuela (E/1982/3/Add.33)

1. At the invitation of the Chairman, Miss Pulido (Venezuela) took a place at the table.

2. Miss PULIDO (Venezuela), introducing her country's initial report concerning rights covered by articles 13 to 15 of the Covenant, said that, as had been the case for the consideration of the report concerning rights covered by articles 10 to 12, the representatives of the Ministries concerned had been unable to attend the meeting because of Venezuela's difficult financial situation. The present report should be considered in conjunction with the reports submitted by Venezuela on the various other social rights, since they were in many respects complementary.

3. She reaffirmed her Government's conviction that education was a priority task which deserved its closest attention. In the past 25 years, the educational system had grown rapidly, and important programmes and institutions had been established such as the "Gran Mariscal de Ayacucho" scholarship programme, the National Institute for Educational Co-operation (INCE) and the National Open University. Recently, reforms had been instituted in basic education.

4. During the previous administration, Venezuela had established a Ministry of State for the Development of Intelligence, whose innovative work had attracted the attention of countries in various regions of the world. The programmes and plans for which that Ministry had been responsible were currently directed by the Ministry of Education. In recent years, new impetus had been given to the adult literacy campaign being executed through the Cultural Association for Development (ACUDE), which was supported by both the State and private enterprise.

5. As could be seen in the report, the educational system had two basic components: formal education and informal education. Since 1958, there had been an upsurge in the number of students and teachers in primary, secondary and higher education, in particular in higher education, where the number of students had increased by 13 times between 1960 and 1981. Moreover, the number of public libraries had doubled between 1979 and 1983.

6. In Venezuela, 30 per cent of the population was enrolled in the formal educational system. More than 90 per cent of the primary-school-age population was in school, compared to 79 per cent in 1961. In 1981, more than 2 per cent of Venezuelans were receiving higher education, compared to only 0.3 per cent in 1961.

7. Although the educational level of the population had risen significantly, illiteracy still affected 12 per cent of the population over 15 in 1984, or 1 million persons. Moreover, the problem of school drop-outs persisted. Only 61 per cent of pupils entering primary school completed six years; in secondary

(Miss Pulido, Venezuela)

school, 64 per cent graduated after five or six years; and, at Simón Bolívar University, for example, only 17 per cent of students completed their studies five years after they had entered.

8. With regard to the right to participate in cultural life, the State had made immense efforts to bring the benefits of culture to all strata of the population. Many cultural centres had been established both in the capital and outside, and the State also supported private cultural institutions. The Fine Arts Museum in Caracas had been renovated and expanded, and museums had been opened in other cities. To encourage the study of the plastic arts, there were both public and private schools, and national prizes had been established, such as the National Prize for Painting. The Government subsidized orchestras which presented concerts weekly and toured the country, with the aim of extending the enjoyment of classical music to the entire population at low prices or even free. The number of establishments where concerts and plays were presented had also increased. In addition, the national cinema, backed by the Government in recent years, had reached a peak of prosperity and development.

9. Mrs. KIMATA (Japan) said that more information would be welcome concerning State licensing of pre-school centres, as referred to in paragraph 17 of the report. She wished to know, in particular, whether such institutions were financed by private companies or by the Government. Referring to the training programmes of the National Institute for Educational Co-operation (INCE), she asked whether occupational training was included, and whether the National Apprenticeship Scheme was operated by the Government or the private sector. She wondered whether private companies were required to pay contributions to th Government to support the scheme. It would be useful to learn whether such training was carried out on the job, and whether, when it was completed, employment was guaranteed. She also wished to know whether INCE provided retraining or upgrading of skills for adults in order to meet the increasing demand for skilled workers. Lastly, it was unclear whether the projects and programmes for the development of intelligence were being introduced into all primary and secondary schools.

10. Mr. TEXIER (France) said that a more precise description of Venezuela's educational programmes would be welcome, including more statistics. With regard to the implementation of article 14 of the Covenant, he asked whether Venezuela had been able to secure compulsory primary education, free of charge, for all. He asked about the minimum educational qualifications which an individual was required to have in order to open a pre-school. He noted that Venezuela had been chosen to host the first World Congress on the Development of Intelligence, held in 1984; it would be useful to have a full account of that meeting and its conclusions. Further information would also be helpful on the relationship between public and private universities. He asked whether there was a national university supported by the State and, if so, whether the tuition was either very low or free. Were private universities expensive and, if so, did the Government provide scholarships?

11. As to article 15, he would be grateful for additional data concerning the Tunisia Model Copyright Law, referred to in paragraph 65, and concerning the types of dispute which arose with regard to the protection of literary and artistic works. Lastly, it would be interesting to learn about any actions taken by the Government to preserve the indigenous culture.

12. Mrs. JIMENEZ BUTRAGUEÑO (Spain) said that she would have liked to have seen more statistical data in the report. It seemed that volunteers played an important part in pre-school education in Venezuela and she wondered whether there were many volunteers in the social services in that country because that could contribute to the unemployment problem.

13. She wished to know whether the programmes for the development of intelligence referred to in paragraphs 23-27 of the report were intended only for gifted children and whether they took into account matters such as co-operation and solidarity among all groups. She also wished to have some information on the results of those programmes.

14. She also wished to know more about the pre-military instruction referred to in paragraph 35, in particular, its duration.

15. With respect to higher education, the difficulties referred to in paragraph 42 were experienced by several countries, including her own, and she wished to know what were the requirements for admission to such education. Were students from rich families admitted to such education even if they were unqualified? With respect to adult education, she wished to know whether there were training activities for those who had lost their jobs and whether there was on-the-job training. Paragraph 50 stated that it was possible for public sector workers to acquire basic education and, in that connection, she wished to know what were the qualifications for employment in the public sector.

16. She also wished to have some information on the participation of females at the various levels of education in Venezuela.

17. Mr. POERSCHKE (German Democratic Republic) noted that the report stated that, while pre-school and basic education were free, secondary and higher education were not. He wished to know what was the average percentage of the budget earmarked for education in Venezuela.

18. Secondly, he wondered whether the scholarships for low-income, middle and working class students referred to in paragraph 57 meant that there was discrimination against talented students.

19. Paragraph 10 stated that pre-school education was only gradually becoming compulsory and he wished to know what were the main obstacles to that goal and what percentage of the children of that age group were enrolled in pre-school education. He also wished to know whether the mass media were obliged to publicize the programmes referred to in paragraphs 15 and 16.

20. Were the three years of the basic cycle of secondary education referred to in paragraph 20 compulsory and free? Paragraph 30 stated that a seventh grade had been established in most rural schools and that some already had an eighth grade. That seemed to contradict paragraph 20 which stated that basic education lasted no less than nine years. He would like some clarification in that regard. He also wished to have more information on the programmes for the development of the intelligence referred to in paragraphs 23-27.

(Mr. Poerschke, German Democratic Republic)

21. He wished to know whether the pre-military education referred to in paragraph 35 was compulsory for all, including girls, and what was the position of the Catholic Church on the matter. He would also welcome some statistical data on the participation of women as compared to men in the institutions of higher education.

22. Mr. MRACHKOV (Bulgaria) said that the report showed that the Government of Venezuela, in its Constitution, had adopted legislation for the protection of the rights covered by articles 13 to 15 of the Covenant and had made remarkable progress in that regard. He had, however, expected more information on the practical implementation of those articles. For example, what were the results of the projects and programmes referred to in paragraph 27? How many students were enrolled in private education institutions, including universities? What percentage of the national budget was devoted to educational and cultural activities? Article 15 of the Covenant provided for the enjoyment of the benefits of scientific progress and its applications. He wished to know whether there were any specialized and research institutions established in Venezuela and what part of the educational budget was allocated to them.

23. There was a strong current of immigration towards Venezuela and he wished to know more about the right to education and the right to participate in cultural activities of the children of migrants and immigrants.

24. He would like some information on government policy with respect to post-university study and on the number of students who failed to complete their education in the specified period. He was surprised to learn that only 17 per cent of students completed their studies in higher education. That would have a troublesome impact on society as a whole and he wished to know what was the Government's efforts to reverse that situation.

25. Mr. YAKOVLEV (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics), noting that Venezuela had made great efforts to implement the Covenant, said that he too would have preferred the report to have contained more statistical data.

26. He also wished to know whether religious courses were taught in the schools or whether education was purely secular. For example, were the catechism and scientific doctrines such as Darwin's theory of evolution taught in Venezuela. It was well known that such teachings were prohibited in some countries, especially where education was locally controlled.

27. He also wished to know more about the programmes of both public and private education and whether the system imparted information on the United Nations and the various human rights documents that the Organization had adopted.

28. He hoped that the representative of Venezuela would be able to provide statistics on the number of females in the educational system, especially at the secondary and higher level.

(Mr. Yakovlev, USSR)

29. He inquired what efforts were being made to educate the indigenous population and whether they were taught in the indigenous languages. He also wished to know about the educational possibilities for poor children, in view of Venezuela's economic difficulties, and whether there were programmes to assist students from poor backgrounds.

30. Mr. BENDIX (Denmark) said that he would like to know what the school starting age was in Venezuela, what portion of the country's total budget was allocated to culture and education, whether there was a free choice of schools, how many pupils attended public and how many attended private schools, and whether the curricula of both categories had to comply with any Government directives. He would also appreciate figures on the ratio between the total number of students in the country and the number of persons of school age. Paragraphs 34 and 35 did not indicate that ratio or how it may have changed.

31. It would be useful to have more information about the Integrated Higher Education Subsystem referred to in paragraph 43 of the report, and, in connection with paragraph 47, about plans to integrate handicapped pupils into the normal school system. He commended Venezuela's efforts to combat illiteracy in the indigenous population, and would appreciate more information about the literacy campaign, and particularly how it reached people in the rural areas.

32. The CHAIRMAN, speaking as a member of the Working Group, said that he would appreciate figures showing how many students had been enrolled in primary, secondary and higher educational establishments in Venezuela in 1960 and how many there were enrolled in them today, so as to show the percentage of increase, especially in the context of the country's rapid population growth. Such figures would also show the increased participation of women in the country's educational life.

33. In his own country, education was designed to inculcate national pride, without exclusiveness or hostility towards other nations, and with emphasis on international solidarity and co-operation. He wondered whether that was also the philosophy of education in Venezuela.

34. He also wondered what role the Catholic church played in Venezuela's educational system, what percentage of students attended public schools, what percentage attended private schools and what special provisions there were for religious education.

35. Venezuela had not long ago instituted a major programme of scholarships for study abroad, and some 10,000 Venezuelan students had participated in it at great expense. He would like to know what the results of that programme had been, whether all the participating students had returned to Venezuela or whether the programme had resulted in a brain drain, and whether the programme was still in operation.

36. Mr. LY (Senegal) said that Venezuela's report stressed legal provisions rather than the implementation and practical results of programmes and projects.

37. In connection with paragraph 5, for example, he would welcome a breakdown of illiteracy rates for city and country and for different age and economic groups. He also wondered how much money was allocated to education.

38. More information would also be welcome about education in rural areas and, in connection with paragraph 35, he would like to know the meaning of the terms "pre-military instruction" and "experimental phase". In connection with paragraph 36, he asked how education in Venezuela was geared to the needs of the labour market and what practical experience Venezuela might have in that regard that could be useful to developing countries. Referring to paragraph 40, he asked what practical effects the use of television as a training method, which was of interest to many countries, had had in urban and rural areas. In connection with higher education, he wondered whether any Government body helped students to find places in universities, how many scholarships were available and how generous they were in terms of the cost of living. Turning to paragraphs 58 and 59, he would like to know whether efforts to assist indigenous groups gave priority to certain groups, whether all indigenous languages were taught or only some, and what efforts had been made to develop writing in those languages and with what success.

39. He wondered how much interministerial co-ordination there was to implement the goal set forth in paragraph 61 (e) and how the international agreements and treaties referred to in paragraph 62 (e) were applied in practice.

40. He would welcome information about the status of research workers and efforts to improve the pay of teachers. Lastly, he inquired what formal arrangements existed to assist those who created and developed national cultural values.

41. Mrs. JIMENEZ-BUTRAGUEÑO (Spain) asked whether the Ministry referred to in paragraph 27 (b) had the same rank as other Ministries since it was referred to as a "Ministry of State".

The meeting rose at 12.25 p.m.